

# Job hunting tips for older professionals

A California court recently upheld the claim of former employee of Nestle USA who claimed that his company overlooked him for promotion because of he was above 40. The court granted him \$5 million as compensation.

Employers agree that in a workforce which is rapidly getting younger (with undergraduates populating BPOs and CEOs in their thirties), being above 40 is often a serious disqualification. Thus age discrimination is often practiced subtly but frequently against workers in forties and fifties who are considered to be past their prime. Similarly mature job seekers often lose out to their younger counterparts while hunting for another job or looking for a career change. This is specially true in the Indian context where more than 90 per cent of the population is below 59 and industries are witnessing a youth-boom.

Older job seekers seeking a mid-career job change or those looking for post-retirement jobs or homemakers re-entering the job market will find that it pays to be smart when they are competing with younger applicants.

Resume strategies for older job seekers: Employers have certain set prejudices against older workers. Older professionals are perceived to be difficult to train in new skills. They are thought to be computer-challenged and it is assumed that they cost the company higher, since they want higher salaries. If you are a professional above 40 and are finding it difficult to hunt for a job here are some certain important changes you should be making to your resume.

Give importance to transferable skills: Older professionals should give less importance to dates in their resume. In fact older job seekers should follow the functional resume format which gives more importance to transferable skills and gives little or no importance to dates. Transferable skills are those skills which are not limited to any one job but can be transferred to many occupations. For example a manager may have developed technical skills, leadership skills or mediation skills which may not only be restricted to his present job, but might be useful in all future jobs as well. Some examples of transferable skills are: "Motivate others, plan and arrange programmes and events, Deal with obstacles and problems, co-ordinate with large team, handle complaints, manage finance."

Follow The 15-year Principle: Resume of mature workers should include only last 15years of experience. If the applicant has more years of experience under his belt then details of initial jobs should be omitted unless they make a vital difference in acquiring the current job.

Highlight New Learning: Older professionals are perceived as being more resistant to change and less flexible and adaptable. The resume of an older worker should highlight the willingness to adopt new practices and the enthusiasm to learn new things. For example, any workshops, seminars taken in the past five years to update skills or learn new ones will emphasise the willingness of applicant to adapt quickly to change.

**Highlight Technical Learning:** The more technical the job, the younger the person manning it. The software boom has been responsible for tech savvy young professionals; at ease in the world of computers, gaining an edge while the pre-computer generation watches helplessly. Unfortunately, lack of technical skills is largely responsible for apprehensions in hiring older professionals. Thus updating technical and computer skills goes a long way towards alleviating the apprehensions of young recruiters towards recruitment of mature candidates.

Similarly, applicants should ensure that they update their basic skills in computers and the relevant softwares, even if it requires special courses or personal expense. Nothing impresses an interviewer more than knowing that the candidate is willing to spend his own money to learn new skills. For example: The Resume should say "Took one year evening basic computer course to update computer skills." Or "Did online courses of action scripting and 3D animation to update my designing skills."

**Highlight Accomplishments:** An inevitable advantage that older professionals have over younger workers is more of professional achievements in their longer career span. Thus resumes of mature job hunters should pay more importance to achievements in various jobs rather than job responsibilities. The achievements should demonstrate the candidate's problem solving abilities, wisdom and teamwork capabilities.

### **Interview Strategies For Older Job-Seekers**

Older job seekers often get defensive and unnerved on being interviewed by younger hiring managers and lose out the job to a younger applicant. It is essential that older job seekers practice on how to tackle job interviews beforehand.

**Demonstrate your Worth:** Older job seekers need to convince the recruiter on the great value they will add to the company through their experience and skills. Thus it is imperative that candidates pinpoint their high learning curve and ability to work with varied age groups. Give examples of problems and how they were tackled and how these problem-solving skills can be transferred to the present company. For example you can present a solution to existing problem of the company. This will impress the recruiter with you initiative and problem solving abilities. (However the problem solving approach should only be taken if the solution is genuine and well researched.)

**Be prepared for uncomfortable Questions:** Most job seekers in their 40s and 50s get antagonised by the seemingly impertinent questions of the interviewers. "How old are you?" or "Don't you feel you will have a problem working with younger office colleagues?" or "Will you be able to report to a younger person?" are questions which often infuriate an older job seeker. Though employers agree that such questions often seem impolite, they represent the major concerns of the recruiter and it is best to tackle them upfront. The trick here is to remain positive and cool. Older interviewees should calmly answer such questions with: "do you feel that my age will affect my ability to work efficiently? Or "I have no problems in reporting to a younger person as long as I can learn something from them." Or "In my previous company, I had no problems in working with a team which was younger than me." The applicant should back up their answers with examples from previous companies.

**Emphasize learning abilities:** The candidate should summarise all the past training programmes, seminars and workshops which highlight him as a go-getter with a learning attitude. For employers the non-learning bias is the major hurdle against the job seekers. For example: Interest in learning new things can be pointed out by saying, "I did a one-year computer course on my own time." Or "I volunteered to attend weekend workshops on advanced accounting." To demonstrate his future willingness to learn on the job the interviewee should point out his willingness to take up any further training/ refresher course.

**Use Your References:** Older job seekers should be very selective about giving references. Make sure that references of only those those bosses or colleagues is given who will highlight learning skills, ability to adapt to all situations and problem solving skills etc.

Fortunately, perceptions about mature job seekers are slowly changing. A Delhi based headhunter says that large call centres like Spectramind are slowly shifting focus from young twenties something to professionals in their thirties, housewives and even retired professionals with good communication skills. "This is because teenagers and youngsters often shift jobs for the most trivial of reasons, however older and mature professionals tend to be much more stable." So make age an asset rather than a disadvantage.

*Sourced from Naukri.com*